

# Texas Representative Roberto R. Alonzo's

## Capitol Report



### Judge Dietz Orders Re-Hearing in State's School Finance Case \*

On Tuesday, June 19, Travis County District Judge John Dietz announced that he will re-open the school finance trial to consider actions taken by the 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas legislature, and has tentatively set the re-hearing to begin January 6, 2014. The hearing is expected to last approximately six weeks. Judge Dietz issued a ruling from the bench on February 4 that the Texas school finance system is unconstitutional because it is inequitable, it does not provide enough revenue to school districts for the education of their students, and the lack of revenue has forced so many school districts to tax at the \$1.17 M&O (Maintenance & Operation) rate cap that the system has become a de facto state property tax. His final ruling was expected in mid-March, but he has been waiting due to the restoration of \$3.4 billion in formula funding from the \$4.0 billion cut last session and the passage of over 100 bills that affect public education in Texas. He has asked attorneys in the case to submit to him a list of bills passed by the legislature that will affect exhibits and data used in the trial. He will then issue a schedule on July 17, 2013 for re-pleadings, discovery and either re-affirm the January 6 trial date or set a revised date for trial.

A 6-week trial in January-February 2014 would likely result in a final decision by Judge Dietz in March 2014. If there is an expedited appeal directly to the Texas Supreme Court, it is possible we could see a ruling from the high Court before the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session convenes in January 2015. It is also possible that a ruling is issued by the Court during or after the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, which could result in a special session if the Court rules against the state.

Attorneys in the case had differing opinions on whether Judge Dietz should re-open the case and hold a re-hearing. Most of the plaintiff attorneys were in agreement that some re-assessment of trial evidence is necessary with the exception of attorneys for the Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund (MALDEF), who strongly opposed the motion. The Attorney General's Office also agreed that the case should be re-opened, but stated that the re-hearing should be accomplished in 4-5 days.

[\* Information partially excerpted from the June 2013 Edition of TTARA Newsletter]

### Win a Hybrid Car



#### DRIVE CLEAN ACROSS TEXAS AIMS TO KEEP THE AIR CLEAN, SAVE GAS WHILE OFFERING CHANCE TO WIN HYBRID CAR

Statewide campaign offers helpful tips for keeping air clean, saving money

Rep. Alonzo urges all Texans to take part in this year's **Drive Clean Across Texas** campaign which aims to keep the air clean, save gas, but the best part of all, offers you a chance to win a Hybrid car. "Keep our air clean, save gas and win a car? Can't ask for anything better than that," said Rep. Alonzo. "Just take part in the **Drive Clean Across Texas** campaign and visit the website, [DriveCleanAcrossTexas.org](http://DriveCleanAcrossTexas.org)" continued Rep. Alonzo.

Summer in Texas not only means road trips and vacations, but also soaring temperatures and an increase in ozone pollution levels. To help motorists save money and keep the air clean, the Texas Department of Transportation and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality are launching this year's **Drive Clean Across Texas** campaign. The campaign offers gas-saving tips for motorists and a chance to win a 2013 Ford Fusion Hybrid.

"Harmful, ground-level ozone is formed when chemicals found in vehicle exhaust and other sources combine with sunlight and heat," said Margo Richards, TxDOT Travel Information Division director. "The good news is that all drivers can make a difference in our air quality. Simple steps such as checking your tire pressure and getting your car tuned up on schedule can reduce tailpipe emissions, improve fuel economy and save drivers money at the pump."

If you keep the correct pressure in your tires, you can help keep the air clean and save about \$85 a year in gas. Drive Clean Across Texas also warns that driving a car in need of maintenance can add \$120 to annual gas spending.

For more tips on keeping the air clean and saving money on gas, visit the Drive Clean Across Texas website at [DriveCleanAcrossTexas.org](http://DriveCleanAcrossTexas.org). Visitors also can register online for a chance to win a low-emission, gas-saving Ford Fusion Hybrid car sponsored by the Dallas Cowboys. The deadline for entering is Sept. 15, 2013. The winner will be announced at Cowboys Stadium on Sunday, Oct. 6.

For more information, you may also contact TxDOT Media Relations at [MediaRelations@txdot.gov](mailto:MediaRelations@txdot.gov) or (512) 463-8700.